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## THE INTERNAL SITUATION IN RUSSIA

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The internal situation in Russia is rightly considered in connection with the settlement of political affairs in the Far East, because it deeply affects the ability of Russia to carry on the war. The home situation and the war situation react upon each other. The disasters of the war have greatly aggravated the internal disorders, and the violent disturbances within the empire have prevented the government from putting all its strength into the struggle in Manchuria.

Of all nations of Europe, Russia seemed to the casual observer, a year and a half ago, to be the most settled, the most stable and the most sodden. It had gone for three centuries with little structural change or advance. The autocracy appeared to be firmly seated. The body of the people were ignorant, patient and submissive. With apparent suddenness and immediately in conjunction with the gravest external calamities which any nation has suffered for a century comes a violent and convulsive outbreak. This upheaval, if not revolutionary in form, is essentially revolutionary in character and in substance. It is aimed at results which involve a radical change in the government, and it has taken such a hold upon the nation and has obtained such an impulse that it is really epochal in its significance and its consequences.

This movement, though apparently sudden in its violent outbreak and in its dramatic form, had its origin some years ago. Though brought to a head by the appalling failures of the war, it sprang from anterior causes. It is in reality a revolt against the abuses and evils of the bureaucratic government. It has two sources and points in two directions. The first is industrial and the second agricultural. Under the policy of Witte, who became Minister of Finance in 1892 and who was the chief force in the administration

of the empire for ten years, Russia has had a new and extraordinary industrial development. Within ten years the number of hands employed in the industrial arts more than doubled. The consumption of cotton in cotton manufactures nearly trebled and in iron manufacture Russia rose to the fourth place among the nations, ranking next to Germany and ahead of France. During the same time more than 17,000 miles of railroad were opened and in a decade the passenger traffic multiplied five fold and the freight traffic more than eight fold.

This rapid and remarkable growth has developed an industrial class in the large centres of population quite distinct from the peasantry of the country. It was recruited to some extent from the latter, but with more activity and with an infusion of other elements, it became more alert and susceptible. The riotous outbreaks which began in St. Petersburg, culminating in the bloody conflict of the Red Sunday on January 22, came from these workers. They extended through many large cities where industrial establishments existed until the whole body of the laboring population seemed to be violently arrayed against the existing order and the nation was seething with ferment and disturbance. The ostensible cause was labor grievances, but the underlying impulse was political agitation inspired by the radical revolutionists and aiming at the overthrow of the present organic structure.

The second source of discontent was earlier in origin and is more conservative, deep-seated and far-reaching. Though the labor disturbances have been the more aggressive and violent, the other movement is one of broader basis and of more portentous character. It rests upon the great agricultural element and is centered in the wide demand for the extension of the Zemstvo institutions. It is liberal in spirit, but not destructive in purpose. It is reformatory rather than anarchistic. It is revolutionary in the sense of looking to a radical change in the representative character of the government, but not revolutionary in violent thought and method. It embraces not only the leaders of the peasantry and a considerable body of independent landholders, but the educated people in the cities. And it embodies the hopes of the thinking and progressive classes who see that the archaic system of Russia is alien to the spirit of the age and that both for safety and for advance it must acquire a more representative character.

Russia presents a curious paradox. Theoretically, it combines the most extreme autocracy with the most extreme democracy. The local unit is the *Mir*, or village commune. These village communes in which the land is held in common and apportioned for cultivation among the families, embrace the great body of the Russian people. They are wholly democratic in organization and government, though their scope is limited purely to local concerns. They are grouped together in districts, and district *Zemstvos*, or assemblies, are chosen by elective bodies which include each class of the community. The district *Zemstvos*, which are made up of peasants as well as nobles, in turn elect the members of the provincial *Zemstvos*, or assemblies, of which there are thirty-four in all, covering thirty-four of the provinces of the empire. These *Zemstvos* were a part of the reforms instituted by the liberal emperor, Alexander II, and were designed to establish a large measure of local autonomy in matters of local concern.

But when Alexander II was assassinated and reactionary rule set in, the freedom and the power of the *Zemstvos* were greatly reduced. Their authority was largely usurped by the governors of the provinces who stood for the bureaucratic administration. A steady conflict has been going on. This has been specially exemplified in the matter of education. The *Zemstvos* had been originally empowered to provide for schools and they have had a liberal disposition in this direction. But from the first the bureaucratic administration, which was hostile to public education and held it to be dangerous to the Russian system of government, has done everything to embarrass and thwart the movement of the *Zemstvos* for popular instruction. Restrictions of all kinds were interposed and matters went so far that in many cases where the *Zemstvos* had voted the money and built the schools they were constrained to surrender them to the Minister of Public Instruction. Strangely enough, the ministry charged with the care of public education was the most hostile to it, and frequently where it could not destroy the schools established by the *Zemstvos*, it sought to undermine and nullify them by creating rival church schools which reduced education to the narrowest limits.

Another grievance of the most vital character related to the tenure and cultivation of the land. The condition of the peasantry has been of the most appalling character. The apportionment of land in the communes is insufficient for the growing needs. The

agricultural implements are of the most primitive kind. The crop yield per cultivated dessiatine is lower than in any other country in Europe. The taxes are so heavy that a large part of the crops must be sold to meet this demand instead of being used for self-support. The later Russian policy has required heavy exports for its maintenance. The result is that while Russia produces less grain per head than is consumed per head in any other country, she is, at the same time, the second grain exporting country in the world. This fact tells how little is retained for her own sustenance and explains in part why Russia is in a state of almost chronic famine.

All these wrongs and evils together have incited a movement for relief which has taken the form of a demand for enlarged political freedom and social regeneration. Three years ago, the present emperor created a central committee of agriculture under the presidency of Witte to consider the measures necessary to meet these difficulties. This body was supplemented by local advisory committees largely made up from the Zemstvos, and the majority of these committees made recommendations which showed the drift of opinion even then. They insisted that elementary education should be extended; that Zemstvos should be established in provinces where they did not exist and made more representative with larger powers; that the system of village communes should be reconstructed so that through their representative expression the peasants should have equality with others and that free discussion of economic questions should be allowed. Following these demands, a memorandum was presented to the Czar, urging that their old powers should be restored to the Zemstvos, that they should be arranged in groups, and that these groups should elect delegates to a central or national Zemstvo. Here, three years ago, as will be seen, was a suggestion of a national assembly. The effect was plain when in response to the various demonstrations the Czar, in February, 1903, issued a manifesto which, while not conceding all of the demands, held out high promise.

Thus it will be noted that there was a strong agitation for a more liberal system before the war came on. It was not then aimed at the autocracy, but at the bureaucracy. It was the general belief and the common saying that the bureaucrats stood between the emperor and the people. The existing evils were charged to the arbitrary and repressive administrative machinery. They were laid not

to the Emperor, but to such oppressive agents as Plehve, the late Minister of the Interior. As indicated in the Czar's manifesto, assurances were given of relief, but, unfortunately, they were largely nullified through reactionary influences and vacillating purposes. Then came on the war with its demonstration of the hollowness of the Russian system and of the amazing incapacity of bureaucratic rule. Bureaucracy was a conspicuous failure at the only point where any possible merit could be claimed—that of making a strong military power. This demonstration and the calamities which followed it deeply intensified the sentiment for the overthrow of bureaucratic rule, and the meeting of the Zemstvo presidents at St. Petersburg last November, where this sentiment received formal and deliberate expression, was one of the most imposing and significant events in Russian history.

Since then the agitation has become more profound and explosive. It has moved on with the violent industrial outbreaks which we have seen until it has seemed as if the empire stood on the crater of a bursting volcano. These eruptions have been met with weak promises and feeble action. What impresses observers is the apparent doubt, hesitation and imbecility of the government. It seems to have been struck with paralysis. But it is morally certain that the people of Russia, having at length found their voice, will not be silenced until they secure large gains in the form and substance of representative institutions. Whether this advance will come through prudent and timely concessions on the part of the government, or whether it will come through a great cataclysm, no man can yet venture to predict.